



**University of
Zurich**^{UZH}

**Zurich Open Repository and
Archive**

University of Zurich
University Library
Strickhofstrasse 39
CH-8057 Zurich
www.zora.uzh.ch

Year: 2018

Editorial note

Tröhler, Margrit ; Kirsten, Guido

Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich

ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-162013>

Book Section

Published Version



The following work is licensed under a Creative Commons: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0) License.

Originally published at:

Tröhler, Margrit; Kirsten, Guido (2018). Editorial note. In: Tröhler, Margrit; Kirsten, Guido. Christian Metz and the codes of cinema : film semiology and beyond. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 11-13.

Editorial Note

The editors of this volume would like to point out some terminological inconsistencies and editorial decisions. Several fundamental concepts in the field of film semiology possess a certain terminological ‘fuzziness’. This is partly due to the differing epistemological discourses in the French and English-speaking worlds. In part, it also goes back to various historical translations of Metz’s works or, beyond that, of linguistic and philosophical reference works. This has resulted in the authors in this volume sometimes using different terms for the same concept. To avoid confusion, we would like to briefly explain some of the central terms.

The first instance of such a ‘floating’ terminology concerns the word pair semiology/semiotics. The distinction is based on two schools of thought established by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1838-1914) and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). Their respective theories of signs, which were developed simultaneously, differ in the two scholars’ specific approaches: Peirce’s general ‘semiotics’ is rooted in logic and epistemology, while the structuralist focus of Saussure’s ‘semiology’ addresses language (especially verbal language).

When the International Association for Semiotic Studies (*Association Internationale de Sémiotique*, IASS-AIS) was founded in Paris in 1969, ‘semiotics’ was officially determined as the general term. However, especially in France (and also in film studies), the term ‘semiology’ has remained common for all (inter)disciplinary approaches that consider themselves to be part of the Saussurian structuralist tradition (Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Christian Metz, and others). It has also served to mark its distinction from the ‘structural semantics’ of A.J. Greimas and the *Ecole sémiotique de Paris*. In the English-speaking world, the term ‘semiotics’ is more common. The editors of this volume have decided against harmonizing the usage. Thus, while both terms appear in the texts of this book, the authors primarily use them to refer to Metz’s structuralist tradition. Where this is not the case, the connection to the approaches of Peirce or Greimas is either clear from the context or explicitly referred to by the authors.

Another term that might lead to confusion is ‘apparatus’. Here, the problem is largely due to those English translations where Jean-Louis Baudry’s and Metz’s *dispositif* are consistently translated as ‘apparatus’. However, in his text ‘Le dispositif’ (1975), Baudry made a clear distinction: ‘In a general way, we distinguish the *basic apparatus*, which is made up of the ensemble

of operations and technologies that are necessary to produce a film and to project it, from the *dispositive*, which concerns only the projection and includes the subject to whom the projection is addressed.' (*Communications* 23 [1975], 56-72, [pp. 58-59], our translation). The two aspects of the cinematic institution, which are thus translated into English as 'apparatus', are additionally blurred by the fact that 'apparatus theory' has become a common umbrella term for ideological critiques of cinema.

However, there is an increasing emphasis on the distinction between apparatus and dispositive, as evidenced by Frank Kessler's 'Notes on *dispositif*' [<http://www.frankkessler.nl/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Dispositif-Notes.pdf>], or by the volume *Ciné-Dispositives* edited by François Albera and Maria Tortajada (Amsterdam University Press, 2015). In the present volume, the terms 'apparatus' and 'dispositive' are both meant in the sense of Baudry's 'dispositive' when they refer to Metz's *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier* (trans. by Celia Britton and others, Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1982 [1977]).¹ By contrast, in his last book *L'énunciation impersonnelle ou le site du film* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1991), Metz himself often uses 'dispositif' for what belongs to Baudry's 'basic apparatus' – for instance, the camera – as in the chapter 'Exposing the Apparatus' (*Impersonal Enunciation, or the Place of Film*, trans. by Cormac Deane, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, pp. 64-70). Thus, the term 'apparatus' is appropriate in this case.

Another unresolved translation issue has resulted in the synonymous use of 'matter of expression' and 'material of expression'. The concept, introduced into the structuralist debate by the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev in *Omkring sprogteoriens grundlæggelse* (Copenhagen, 1943), was translated into English as 'expression-purport' (*Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, trans. by Francis J. Whitfield, Baltimore: Indiana University Publications in Anthropology and Linguistics 1953). Metz, who productively adopted the concept for his film semiology, uses the French translation *matière d'expression* in order to describe the pre-semiotic, amorphous, physical continuum constituting the five physical foundations of the cinematic language (these five elements are: moving photographic image, dialogue, noise, music, and written materials). Of the two English phrases, 'matter of expression' is the more commonly used, but quotations from *Language and Cinema* (trans. by Donna Jean Umiker-Sebeok, The Hague/Paris: Mouton

1 The American edition, which was published in the same year (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), has turned around the title and subtitle: *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, but the translation and pagination are identical.

1974 [1971]) sometimes also include ‘material of expression’. The same applies to ‘matter of content’ and ‘material of content’. (The editors wish to thank Martin Lefebvre for these explanations with regard to Hjelmslev.)

The Grand Syntagmatique (where Metz isolates eight principal syntagmatic figures of narrative cinema) was translated as ‘The Large Syntagmatic Category’ in *Film Language* (*Film Language. A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. by Michael Taylor, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974 [1968]). However, this phrase never established itself. The authors in this volume use ‘Grand Syntagmatique’ (whether capitalized or not), or sometimes the original French expression *grande syntagmatique*.

The final note relates to a different level and concerns Metz’s final work, *L’énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film* (1991). Until the book’s first integral English translation by Cormac Deane (*Impersonal Enunciation, or the Place of Film*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016; afterword by Dana Polan), which evolved simultaneously with this volume and was published in February 2016, only individual chapters from the book were available in English. Therefore, in most contributions to this volume, the authors or translators themselves have translated quotes directly from the French original. Some authors also refer to Metz’s essay, published prior to the book in *Vertigo* (1 [1987], pp. 13–34), which corresponds more or less to the first chapter of the 1991 book and which was available in an English version: ‘The Impersonal Enunciation or the Site of Film (In the margin of recent works or enunciation in cinema)’, trans. by Béatrice Durand-Sendrail with Kristen Brookes, *New Literary History*, 22/3 (1991), pp. 747–72; reprinted in *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind*, ed. by Warren Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), pp. 140–63.